



The Utility of the “Community Scholar” Identity from the Perspective of Students from one Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies Program

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Abstract

It is recognized that evidence on the social situation of disabled people that could inform policy and other discourses impacting disabled people is missing. Disabled people, and community members linked to disabled people, can contribute to generate the missing evidence. Various barriers exist for community members to perform research; one barrier being that many community members and undergraduate students that work in the community after they graduate do not see themselves as researchers. It has been proposed that the term “Community Scholar” used with the meaning that the community member is the scholar could be used to instill a research identity into community members and into undergraduate students that plan to work in the community after graduation. Obtaining the view of students of one community rehabilitation and disability studies academic program using an online survey revealed that participants had never heard of the concept of “Community Scholar” but that participants did see the “Community Scholar” identity to be of use for themselves such as their career and the community they plan to work in and with after graduation. Having been exposed to the “Community Scholar” identity would have enticed participants to seek out research training and to see themselves performing research as part of their community employment after graduation, something they did not do before the survey. Our findings indicate that the “Community Scholar” identity might be a useful tool to increase the interest in being a community researcher within community members and undergraduate students that work in the community after graduation. Our study suggests that research might be warranted to obtain the views of students from other Universities and degree programs on the concept of “Community Scholar”, to investigate barriers to being a “Community Scholar” and to think about teaching potential “Community Scholars” how to perform research.

Keywords: community scholar; disabled people; people with disabilities; community-based rehabilitation; community rehabilitation; disability studies; undergraduate students; graduate students; community member.

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Introduction

Public policies, and moreover, the evidence utilized to inform public policy decisions impact disabled people (Wolbring et al. 2016). Yet, it is known that there is a lack of evidence on the social situation of disabled people (World Health Organization 2011, Berghs et al. 2016). It is also recognized that disabled people and people linked to the disability community are the experts of their current social situation and as such, can generate the evidence missing (World Health Organization 2015). However, many barriers exist for this to happen. One barrier proposed is the disassociation of the disability community, which includes disabled people and their supports, recognizing themselves as community based researchers (Wolbring et al. 2016). Another barrier proposed is that many undergraduate students, including undergraduate students in the disability studies field, who will likely work in the community post-degree, do not see themselves performing research in the community after graduation (Wolbring et al. 2016) and that undergraduate students rarely identify themselves as researchers (McGinn and Lovering 2009). It has been proposed that the concept of “Community Scholars” - whereby the term is used to identify community members that perform research in the community - could be used to instill a researcher identity into community members and into students who plan to work in and with the community upon completion of their degree (Wolbring et al. 2016).

Our study involved undergraduate students (disabled and non-disabled) from one Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (CRDS) program. Many CRDS students will go on to work in the community with and for disabled people when they graduate from the program. The purpose of this study was to ascertain: a) participants’ awareness of the “Community Scholar” concepts and the utility of the “Community Scholar” concepts for the participant, and b) the views participants had on the utility of the “Community Scholar” identity for the community. The empirical data contributes to closing a gap in the community scholar and community based research literature, which has not engaged with the area of how to instill a community scholar identity into bachelor students so that the students engage in community research after graduation.

This article is structured into five parts. In the first part, an extensive literature review of the topic of evidence generation as it relates to disabled people, of how the terms of “Community Scholar” and “Community Researcher” are used in the literature and of the topic of research identity of students is provided. The second part outlines the study design and how the research was performed. The third part presents the findings from this study. The fourth part presents our analysis of the findings drawing from the literature review and part five of this article presents our conclusions and future directions.

Literature Review

Knowledge Production, Data-Based Evidence and Disabled People

Public participation theory is described as “the process of involvement in public decision-making” (Pascu 2011, p. 16) whereby the public has meaningful participation that influences decisions (Arnstein 1969). According to the International Association for Public Participation



(IAP2) there are five public participation categories, “depending on the ‘power balance’ between the policy maker and the citizen” (Cheung and Wolbring 2017, p. 3). Various other ladders of participation exist (Radchuk et al. 2016). The question that arises is, what is the role of knowledge generation, of evidence generation, to be able to move from one level of a given ladder to the next and who generates the evidence for the different levels. There is a relationship between knowledge production and the position one has on the ladder (Hurlbert and Gupta 2015, Gemma 2015). Furthermore knowledge is one factor that shapes society and therefore needs to be governed (Gerritsen et al. 2013). Knowledge governance is “the intentional achievement of societal and policy change through the purposeful production and dissemination of knowledge” (Gerritsen et al. 2013, p. 606).

Disabled people are highly impacted by the evidence used to inform policies (Wolbring et al. 2016). According to (Reddy and Sahay 2016): “Evidence-based policy (EBP) acknowledges the responsibility of decision makers for the conscientious use of evidence to design, manage and reform systems of support for communities in a manner that predictably yield outcomes of benefit” (p. 397). Furthermore values people hold “are an important part of evidence-based policy decision making” (Parker 2017, p. 793).

It is recognized that the “‘evidence-based policy’ discourse itself may be limiting the possibilities of what can be thought and said, and the political implications of the taken-for-granted status of this discourse” (Lancaster et al. 2017, p. 61).

At the same time, missing evidence on the social situation of disabled people has been noted and questioned by many (Chataika and McKenzie 2016, World Health Organization 2011, Berghs et al. 2016) including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2015) and in disability studies academic literature (Sigurjónsdóttir and Rice 2016, Ward and Banks 2017). Moreover, disabled people perceive themselves to be omitted from the policy decision-making process (Dust et al. 2006, Wolbring et al. 2013), a sentiment that is not receiving much academic attention. By conducting a search in four academic databases (Scopus, PubMed, EBSCO-Host - containing 70 databases, and Web of Science) for articles that contained “evidence-based decision making” or “evidence-based policy” in the abstract only one article contained the term “disabled people” in the abstract and one the term “people with disabilities” in the abstract.

“Community Scholar”

Scholars have recognized the importance of the role of community members (both disabled and non-disabled) in producing knowledge, in generating data-based evidence, whether through the support of academic institutions or by other means of support. These actions are referred to within academic literature as: “citizen science” (Kullenberg and Kasperowski 2016a, Evans and Plows 2007), “civic science” (Breen et al. 2015), “participatory action research” (Leadbeater 2017, Tanabe et al. 2017, Fals-Borda 1987) and “community driven research” (Kwon et al. 2012, Pandya 2014). Yet, no term exists to identify or give the role of community member researchers their identification. It has been argued that the term “Community Scholar” could be used to identify



a community member as the researcher (Wolbring et al. 2016). However, the term “Community Scholar” is mostly used in academic literature to identify the role of an academic who conducts research with a community and not to identify community members as the principle investigator of a research project (Wolbring et al. 2016).

Another term that could be used to identify community members as principle researchers is “Community Researcher”. A search for the term “Community Researcher” in three academic databases (Scopus which contains 100% of Medline articles, EBSCO-Host which is an umbrella database consisting of 70 databases, and Web of Science) resulted in 78 articles. Interestingly, of these articles only one article did not assume the role of academic institutions as being the principle investigator within a community research project (Breen et al. 2015). This article looked into building an alternative to institutional science and the concept of "civic science" outlining the case study of a “Public Lab” (Breen et al. 2015). With the remaining 77 articles the role of the “Community Researcher” is assumed to be someone who is hired and trained for a project that is led and executed by academics (Hardy et al. 2016, Mosavel et al. 2011), often without further engagement with community researchers and the problems these community researchers may be facing. Some problems faced by community researchers identified include: the need to negotiate the “messiness of real life with the ideals and principles of academic research” (Mistry et al. 2015, p. 29), identifying ‘next steps’ at the end of a research project (Mistry et al. 2015), power asymmetries between academic researchers and community researchers and between community researchers and community members (Hanson and Ogunade 2016, see also Richardson 2014), and problems with academic ethics approval processes for community-based projects (Mistry et al. 2015, Marlowe and Tolich 2015). Richardson (2014) argues for synergy between community-based participatory research and citizen science drawing the conclusion:

...that a professional and scientific orientation to public policy research can be retained without necessarily being professionally dominated. Research methods and skills are tools to which more people outside the profession could have access, if academics facilitate the process of democratization of policy research (Richardson 2014, p. 32).

We also looked at the types of social groups identified within the 78 academic articles. Indigenous groups were the most mentioned social groups appearing in 20 articles between the years of 1988-2016 (Kelly et al. 2012, Hoare et al. 1993). Within these 20 articles most articles simply mentioned the community researcher as one of the roles held in the project without further engaging with the concept. For example:

There was continual linkage with teachers and community leaders through the community researcher regarding the research intents (Petrucka et al. 2016, p. 185).

A research understanding was developed with three Elders, six youth researchers, and one community researcher with respect to the research protocols, ethics, funding allocations, and research sharing. Initially, this phase required academic involvement, but very quickly it became a



community-driven component to which the academic representative(s) were invited (Petrucka et al. 2016, p. 187).

Interestingly, one article from 1993 highlighted that the indigenous community linked to that project felt it was not a good idea to hire a community member as a researcher because the results may not be seen as credible which may jeopardize the position of the indigenous community on the topic researched (Hoare et al. 1993). Another article focusing on indigenous people discussed the problem of discourse friction such as the binary subjectivities between the academic researcher and community researcher in community-based research, using Foucault's lens on the notion of power (Hanson and Ogunade 2016). An article by Kelly et al. (2012) gave a voice to the community researchers who shared their motivational factors for wanting to be a community researcher within their communities; for example, making a difference in indigenous health. Kelly et al. (2012) also identified various positive effects and pitfalls attached to being a "Community Scholar". Fletcher et al. (2012) discussed how consent must be obtained from indigenous community members so that the "community researchers believed in the university researchers' commitment to a relational and ethical process" (p. 338).

As for disabled people as a social group some articles wrote about researching topics of relevance to disabled people, however, they did not mention disabled people as community scholars: "Community researchers and change agents have developed some strategies for involving consumers in determining what kinds of goals and methods to be pursued, including needs assessment" (Fawcett 1991, p. 624). One article mentioned that selecting a place accessible for disabled people was important as a point of action for undergraduates that want to be community researchers during their academic training (Keys et al. 1999) but the article did not suggest disabled people as being the researchers either. Only two articles mentioned disabled people explicitly as community researchers (Sandys 1998, Powers 2017). Sandys (1998) identified one disabled person in the article as a community researcher but did not expand further on what their role entailed: "The community researcher was an ethno-racial person with a disability" (Sandys 1998, p. 4). The article by Powers (2017) explicitly mentions disabled people as "community researchers": "action research involving community researchers with DD [developmental disability] may hold promise for overcoming concerns related to using rigorous experimental methods for investigating solutions to complex challenges, such as communication and decision making by persons with severe disabilities" (pp. 43-44). Powers (2017) engages with the concept of the "community researcher" listing the benefits of this role to include: "increased knowledge, skill, and leadership development by community researchers" (p. 44). Powers (2017) suggests that the "reluctance by academic researchers to involve community researchers is a result of the community scholars' lack of technical research skills such as measurement, analysis, and writing, because they question whether community partners have sufficient knowledge or capacity" (p. 44), and the inconvenience of "providing accommodations that optimize participation of community researchers and research participants" (p. 44).

However no article covered how to teach community members in general how to do research. If, teaching community members to be community scholars was covered within the context of a



given project (Petrucka et al. 2016). Given this result, we searched Google Scholar for the phrase “teaching disability studies” which brought up academic literature engaging with various aspects of teaching disability studies (Duane 2014, Thomson 1995, Meekosha and Dowse 2007, Cushing and Smith 2009), but no article engaged with how to train community members such as disabled community members to be community scholars or how to teach undergraduate students to do research as a community member after graduation.

Issues with the ‘Researcher’ Identity

Identity theory covers social factors that define the self, whereby the perception of ‘self’ is influenced by the role one occupies in the social world (Hogg et al. 1995). One can have many different identities, whereby different identities have different weight for oneself (Hogg et al. 1995). Identities are seen to have five distinct features; namely identities are social products, self-meaning, symbolic in a sense that one’s response is similar to response by others, reflexive and a “source of motivation for action particularly actions that result in the social confirmation of the identity” (Burke and Reitzes 1991, p. 242). (Uzzell 1979) regards the researcher to have the identity of being an educator, a broker, and an agent of social change. Many authors have noted that it is important to find ways to instill a research identity into students (Saddler 2008, Adedokun et al. 2012, McGinn and Lovering 2009, Purdy and Walker 2013).

It has been proposed that the “Community Scholar” identity might be useful to instill a research identity into undergraduate students (Wolbring et al. 2016). Instilling the “Community Scholar” identity has been furthermore proposed to entice undergraduate students to learn research skills necessary to allow them to produce knowledge as Community Scholar in non-academic environments specifically after graduation (Wolbring et al. 2016). McGinn and Lovering (2009) classify classrooms as communities with members of this community adopting various identities. McGinn and Lovering (2009) captured the importance of the researcher identity with a quote from one participant in one of their studies: “Penny argued that personal interest and emotional reactions were more important indicators of research identity than externally imposed labels” (p.9.) concluding that “[i]ndividuals also need to be engaged in research that they and others believe is valuable in order to develop self-identities as researchers” (p. 9). Employing the social-cognitive model of career choice (Armstrong et al. 2007, Lent et al. 2002) one study interested in factors that favor students to pursue ecological research found that family support, research experience and positive outcome expectation were positively associated with a student’s decision to become an ecologist (Armstrong et al. 2007).

Concluding, the literature review indicates that disabled people are not mentioned in conjunction with “evidence-based policy” and “evidence based decision making” and the lack of evidence pertaining to the social situation of disabled people and that knowledge production is linked to where one is and can be on the ladder of participation. The literature review further revealed that the issue of the community member being the scholar was not engaged with in relation to disabled people and how to teach community members how to be researchers was not engaged with outside of the limited scope of a given project. Finally, the literature around research



identity did engage with the question of how the undergraduate students can be enticed to adopt the identity of researcher but not the identity of being a community researcher after graduation.

Method

Research Design

Mixed-method studies can be operationalized at the paradigm, method and technique level (Sandelowski 2000). This study used a mixed-methods approach at the technique level which encompasses data sampling, collection and analysis (Sandelowski 2000), whereby our mixed method approach takes place on the data collection and analysis level. The purpose of such mixed method approach on the technique level is for triangulation or convergent validation, complementarity to clarify issues or development to guide further sampling. This study used the mixed method approach for complementarity reasons whereby the qualitative data is used “to clarify, explain, or otherwise more fully elaborate the quantitative results” (Sandelowski 2000, p. 248).

An online survey was chosen to reach as many student participants as possible (Schmidt 1997) and to give students the flexibility to participate in this study at their convenience. The questions in the survey were ‘Yes/No’ questions with open comments to allow participants to expand further on their response (Bryman 1988). This approach has also been utilized in other studies (Noga and Wolbring 2013, Haag and Megowan 2015, McClelland 2016, McCaughey and Traynor 2010). The mixed methods approach provided by the online survey allows us to compare the comments (qualitative data) with the ‘Yes/No’ responses (quantitative data) (Creswell 2009). This research design also allowed for multiple measurements of the same question (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). The survey received ethics approval from the University of Calgary. Participants were kept anonymous and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Source

Participants in this study consisted of students from one CRDS program at one academic institution. The students in this program are focused on studies in community rehabilitation and disability studies; two distinct fields concerned with the situation of disabled people in the community. Many of these students will go on in their career working within the community. Table 1 presents the demographic of participants in this study.



Table 1: Demographics of sample

Female	91.67% (n=66)
Male	8.33% (n=6)
Age: 18-30	83.33% (n=60)
Age: 30-65	16.66% (n= 12)
Level of Education: First year undergraduate student	37.5% (n=27)
Level of Education: Second year undergraduate student	13.88% (n=10)
Level of Education: Third year undergraduate student	29.16% (n=21)
Level of Education: Fourth year undergraduate student	19.44% (n=14)

Data Collection

Data was collected through an online delivered survey we created using the Survey Monkey platform. Students in the CRDS program were sent a link to the online survey by various faculty members and the undergraduate program student advisor. Comment boxes were added to Questions 13-28 to give participants the opportunity to further expand on their response to the question (Braun and Clarke 2013). The survey data was collected between September 2016 and November 2016.

Descriptive quantitative data was collected from the intrinsic frequency distribution analysis capability of the Survey Monkey platform. Qualitative data was collected from the responses provided by participants in the comment boxes. Comments that accompanied Questions 13-28 were exported as one PDF file and imported into the qualitative data analysis software application, ATLAS.ti7[®].

Survey Questions

The survey questions were developed by the authors (three first year undergraduate students, one Master’s student and one CRDS program faculty member). The questions were developed keeping in mind the focus of the study, the students’ and faculty’s knowledge of the CRDS program, the social situation of disabled people, the literature around community scholars, community researchers, community-based research, research and the role of evidence-based data to inform the situation of disabled people. The questions explored: a) the awareness of CRDS students on the concept of “Community Scholar” and their views on the utility of this concept in their work with the community; b) students’ views on conducting research themselves in the community and the impact of the “Community Scholar” concept and identity to their role as researchers in the community; and c) students’ views on the state of research in the community and what community organizations that they are familiar with may think about the concept and identity of the “Community Scholar”. The questions are listed in a supplementary file.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The frequency counts and percentage data of the ‘Yes/No’ responses were analyzed.



Qualitative Data

A directed content analysis was used to analyse participant comments. The rationale for using a directed content analysis is to add to research about the phenomenon of community based research, community driven research, participatory action research, research identity and the concept of community scholar, that “would benefit from further description” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, p. 1281). The directed approach codes and analyzes the qualitative data deductively, guided by research literature, which in our case is research that has argued for the utility of the concept of “Community Scholar” and the findings of the literature review we performed. The directed content analysis generates data that enriches the discussion around “Community Scholar”. The coding is deductive in the sense that the top level themes are defined by the questions of the survey which were generated based on prior literature to fill a gap in knowledge (Daly 2007, Mayring 2000). However, the sub-themes that emerged under the top level theme were not pre-set and as such could be seen as an inductive approach (Daly 2007, Mayring 2000). As to the coding procedure, the authors first familiarized themselves with the comments by reading them all the first round and then re-reading the comments and identifying potentially meaningful data (Clarke and Braun 2014). The authors then identified and clustered the themes on the basis of meaning, repetition, the interview questions and the research questions.

Trustworthiness Measures

Credibility/dependability, transferability, and confirmability are four trustworthiness measures to increase the rigour of the study (Baxter and Jack 2008, Lincoln and Guba 1985, Shenton 2004). To enhance credibility/dependability the authors engaged in peer debriefing whereby all authors coded the PDF containing the comments of the participants in ATLAS.ti7[®] and generated themes keeping in mind that the meta-themes were pre-set by the interview questions. Differences in codes and themes between the researchers were discussed and revised as needed. Confirmability is evident in the audit trail made possible by using memo and coding functions within ATLAS.ti7[®]. It is not the intent of our study to be generalizable, however, the data we provide allows for transferability whereby others can decide whether they might want to conduct a similar study. We chose an open access journal as a publisher of this study so that everyone with access to a computer and the internet can have access to this study and decide whether they want to conduct a similar study. Indeed, if one is intrigued by our use of “Community Scholar” as an identity, one can interview students from different degree programs where students work in the community after graduation.

Findings

The 74 students responding reflects 30% of the students in the CRDS program at the time the study took place. The findings in this study are presented in three sections. The first section covers the awareness and utility of the “Community Scholar” concept for the participant (questions 13 and 17). The second section covers specifically the impact of the “Community Scholar” identity on student’s engagement and views of research (questions 15, 16, 19, 20, 22 and 23). Section



three presents findings from the questions focused on the utility of the “Community Scholar” concept for the community the participant was engaged with (questions 18 and 24). Within sections one to three the main results are first reported in a narrative fashion, followed by tables giving the quantitative results of Yes/No questions followed by the results of the qualitative data from the comment boxes as a quantitative list of themes evident and some sample quotes.

Section 1: Awareness and utility of the “Community Scholar” concept for the participant

In short, the responses to questions 13 revealed that 97.06% had never heard of the term “Community Scholar” prior to their participation in the survey (Table 2). The participants were provided with a definition of the term “Community Scholar in the consent form and again before question 15 stating: “There are various meanings to the term “Community Scholar”. For the sake of this survey the meaning is the following: A “*Community Scholar*” is a community member conducting research within the community.” When participants were asked about the utility of this identity for themselves as they go on to work within the community (question 17), 44.44% considered the “Community Scholar” identity as useful to themselves and 12.70% did not consider the identity useful (Table 3) with the two highest utility reasons given that identity would be beneficial to their career and the positive impact on the community (Table 4).

Table 2: Has known about the “Community Scholar” term before the survey (Question 13) (n=68=100%)

Yes	2.94%
No	97.06%

Table 3: “Community Scholar” is of value to participant (Question 17) (n=63=100%)

Yes	44.44%
No	12.70%
No opinion	42.86%



Table 4: Themes evident in the comments given for Question 17 (n=18 comments)

Will benefit my career	n=7
Support community	n=3
Have to make a difference in the community	n=2
“Community Scholar” have a big role to play in the community	n=1
Improves peoples’ lives	n=1
Expands how one sees the community	n=1
Value evidence-based practices and policies that lead to the best outcomes for people in the communities.	n=1
Supports systemic advocacy efforts	n=1
Empowers learning and participation	n=1

Section 2: Utility of the concept of “Community Scholar” for the participant: Research aspect

As to our quantitative data we found that 62.12% of participants had never considered conducting research after graduation before their participation in this study (question 15, Table 5) and only 21.57% thought about conducting research as part of their envisioned occupation (question 16, Table 6). Over 48% of participants could see themselves conducting research in the community after graduation (question 16, Table 7) and more could see themselves as a “Community Scholar” than not, with 35.29% having no opinion (question 20, Table 8). Furthermore, 42% of participants agreed that being exposed to the “Community Scholar” identity would have triggered their action to seek out research training, with only 14% who said they would not have sought further action. However, 42% of participants did not have an opinion (question 22, Table 11), suggesting to us that the “Community Scholar” identity might be more powerful if it were put into context that students can related to. As to how to obtain knowledge on how to conduct research there was an even split in response as to the best way to learn research between theoretical learning and hands on work (question 23, Table 12), with the exception of one participant who felt that research training had to be obtained through various means:

As to our qualitative data the comment boxes revealed various reasons for why participants considered, or did not consider, research as part of their community engagement (question 15, Table 9) or part of their envisioned occupation (no table), and whether they could see themselves, or not, in conducting research after graduation (question 16, Table 10). Select participant comments are quoted to illustrate their views.



Table 5: Has thought about engaging in research as part of community employment after graduation (Question 15) (n=66=100%)

All Participants: Yes	37.87%
All Participants: No	62.12%

Table 6: Has thought about conducting research in the community as part of their occupation (Question 19) (n=51=100%)

Yes	21.57%
No	54.90%
No opinion	23.53%

Table 7: Can see conducting research in the community after graduation given that they received proper training (Question 16) (n=62=100%)

Yes	48.39%
No	30.65%
No opinion	20.67%

Table 8: Could envision themselves as “Community Scholar” (Question 20) (n=51=100%)

Yes	33.33%
No	31.37%
No opinion	35.29%

**Table 9: Reason for having or not having thought about research given in the comment box (Question 15)**

Having thought about research (n=15 comments)	
Already do research	n=3
Health care realities	n=3
Simply stated that they would like to do research	n=2
Benefiting their career	n=2
Benefiting the community	n=2
Always something new to be explored in need of being looked into further, and that research is needed to give “	n=1
Furthering the academic field of disability studies	n=1
Evidence needed to advocate for professional cause.	n=1
Not having thought about research (n=16 comment)	
Never thought about it	n=6
Simply not interested	n=3
Felt they lack the skills	n=3
Does not apply to their career	n=2
Did not make linkage between research and community	n=1
Others do the research	n=1

The main reasons why some of the participants had already thought about research include: they already have first-hand experience in research, the healthcare realities, and that they viewed it to be beneficial to the community and their career. As to the participants who had not considered doing research, the main finding was that they have never thought about this role or had no interest. Some stated that they felt they lacked the skills. Career was also mentioned as a reason why students did not consider research.

I am leaning towards pursuing a career in Physiotherapy after I graduate from CRDS.

After I graduate, I definitely hope to be working towards Occupational Therapy instead of doing research.

As for the participants who thought about performing research as part of their occupation (Question 19, Table 6), one stated:

I do not yet know the organisation I will work for and what will require of their job requirements but I do think as a community scholar we are being trained to be community advocates to fight for the right of the minority and we can



only do that by carrying out active research to expose those aspects that the community is not ignoring for some members of the community.

This participant linked the “Community Scholar” role to a community advocate and that one can only be an advocate through carrying out research.

Another participant viewed being a “Community Scholar” as part of something bigger in their occupation:

Yes, because I have always had a passion for CRDS and I love spending time with my community members, it would make me feel a part of something bigger.

A third participant already had experience conducting research as part of their occupation and outlined various research questions in need of evidence:

I have previously conducted research (though not on a formal basis) in my occupation. I would love to be more involved in research in certain areas - aging and disability, the benefits of understanding death and mortality for people with developmental disabilities, benefits of meaningful community inclusion for members of the greater community, benefits of adult learning in inclusive settings...the list goes on.

Lastly, one participant linked research to allowing her to better serve the needs of her clients:

In my ideal work I would love to conduct research and contribute to the application of the outcomes of the research, on a small scale to find out how to better meet client needs, I feel I have the capacity to do so, however have not been actively seeking out a path that would lead me to taking that journey.

As to the individuals who responded “No” to whether they had considered conducting research in the community, all the answers spanned on the non-interested theme.

As for the participants who could see themselves conducting research in the community after graduation (Question 16, Table 7) they could do so because it fit their personal goals (question 16, Table 10).



Table 10: Reason for seeing or not seeing themselves conducting research in the community after graduation (Question 16)

Can see themselves conducting research in community after graduation (n=15 comments)	
Did not give specific reason:	n=7
Based on personal goals	n=6
Making a difference in the community	n=1
Inspired by having encountered the Community Scholar concept in the survey	n=1
Can NOT see themselves conducting research in community after graduation (n=3 comment)	
No interest	n=2
No Time	n=1

One participant response indicated that they were already influenced by having been exposed to the concept of “Community Scholar” due to taking part in the survey:

After hearing about community scholar I think I would be, especially if I had training and became more confident with my grammar.

Responses indicated that 42.86% would have obtained research training if they would have been exposed to the concept of “Community Scholar” before (Question 22, Table 11).

Table 11: Would have obtained research training if would have been exposed to the concept of “Community Scholar” before (Question 22) (n=35=100%)

Yes	42.86%
No	14.29%
No opinion	42.86%

As to the best ways to obtain research training (Question 23, Table 12) the lectures and hands on experience were the two main ones mentioned.

Table 12: Best way to obtain research training (Question 23)

Best way to obtain research training (n=20 comments)	
Class lectures	n=7
Field experience/practicum	n=6
Instructor information	n=3
Formal research	n=2
Specific research courses	n=1
Peer Mentoring	n=1



Section 3: Utility of the “Community Scholar” identity for the community

Participant responses revealed that 52.83% viewed their identity as a community scholar to be of value to the community (question 18, Table 13). Two main reasons were given: (i) they felt that the community organization can more easily identify people interested in research and, (ii) that the “Community Scholar” identity indicates that the person is interested in the community. All the comments related to this question are displayed in Table 14. Over 60% of the respondents also saw the “Community Scholar” identity as useful to the community organization in general (question 24, Table 15) stating that the identity “helps the community” and “improves community based services” (Table 16).

Table 13: Identifying myself as “Community Scholar” is of value to the community/community organizations (Question 18) (n=63=100%)

Yes	52.38%
No	14.29%
No opinion	33.33%

Table 14: Comments given for identifying oneself as “Community Scholar” being of value to the community/community organizations (n=16 comments) (Question 18)

Helps organization to identify person with a certain role and engage with the person of that role	n=4
Indicates the person is interested in the community	n=3
Promotes people to become lifelong learners	n=3
Helps the community organization to grow	n=2
To raise awareness on issues that hurt community members	n=2
Are to make a difference in the community	n=1
To raise awareness on issues the community may does not know about	n=1

Table 15: See “Community Scholar” identity as useful for the community organizations they are familiar with (Question 24) (n=46=100%)

Yes	60.87%
No	6.52%
No opinion	32.61%



Table 16: Reason given for seeing the “Community Scholar” identity as useful for the community organization they are familiar with (n=16 comments) (Question 24)

Simply stated its useful	n=5
Helps the community	n=3
Improves community based practice	n=3
Helps with understanding client needs	n=1
‘Trained’ Community Scholar is better than an informal researcher;	n=1
Broadens the view of the organization	n=1
Broadens the expertize of the organization	n=1
Could be a career path	n=1

The three main findings of our study are that the participants see a utility of the “Community Scholar” identity for themselves and the community and that it would change participant’s engagement with research within the University and in the community. The majority of participants did not see themselves as community researchers before the study was conducted and had not considered conducting community based research in general or as part of their occupation after graduation before the study. Yet, 48.39% of the participants could envision themselves conducting research in the community after graduation. Some participants felt that their new exposure to the “Community Scholar” identity has enticed them to want to learn how to do research as undergraduates and some participants expressed an interest in learning or furthering their research skills. Participants saw it of value to the community if they themselves identified as community scholars and saw the “Community Scholar” identity as useful to the community organization

Discussion

The discussion is divided into three sections reflecting the three main result sections, analyzing what our findings mean for the student, for research, and for the community.

Section 1: Utility of the “Community Scholar” concept for the participant

According to identity theory, one’s identity is influenced by social factors and one’s perception of oneself is influenced by the role one occupies in the social world. One can exhibit numerous identities at the same time whereby one makes a judgment for oneself as to the importance of any of the identities (Hogg et al. 1995). Identities are a “source of motivation for action particularly actions that result in the social confirmation of the identity” (Burke and Reitzes 1991, p. 242). From our findings, participants viewed the “Community Scholar” identity as a positive identity to occupy within the social world they are in. The two main reasons given were a positive outcome for the career they want to be in and for the community they want to work with. Our findings suggest that the “Community Scholar” identity may be a source of motivation for action in relation to their career and the community. Students in the CRDS program identified



themselves as wanting to be community related advocates, educators or service providers suggesting at least three other identities (personal communication). Furthermore, participants believed that the “Community Scholar” identity might have a positive impact on the community which suggests a possible positive correlation between the scholar and advocacy identity. Furthermore, one study employing the social-cognitive model of career choice (Armstrong et al. 2007, Lent et al. 2002) found that family support, research experience and positive outcome expectation were positively associated with a student’s decision to become an ecologist (Armstrong et al. 2007). Our findings suggest that the students who saw utility in the “Community Scholar” identity had a positive outcome expectation of such identity and might become a “Community Scholar”.

Section 2: Utility of the concept of “Community Scholar” for the participant; Research aspect

Our findings suggests that early introduction of students to the concept and utility of the role of a “Community Scholar”, would make students more inclined to learn, practice, and apply research methods and to see themselves to perform research in the community after graduation. Research experience has been identified as one factor influencing one’s career choice (Armstrong et al. 2007). Adding the research experience for undergraduate students could have a positive correlation to their identification as a “Community Scholar” after graduation.

Our literature review did not find any linkage between a research identity of students and their future research role in the community. We posit that the “Community Scholar” identity may be useful to generate such research identity which focuses on performing research in the community after graduation.

Our findings suggest the usefulness of certain actions within the education of students. Most students from the CRDS program and we submit from other undergraduate disability studies programs, as well as various other degree programs will be occupied in the community. As such it seems reasonable to educate and train students in research for them to learn everything they need in order to be a “Community Scholar”. No article in our literature review covering the search term “teaching disability studies”, “community scholar” and “community researcher” engaged with teaching undergraduate students to be a community scholar after graduation. As such, our findings suggest an opening for adding a new facet to what undergraduate students could be taught especially in academic programs where students work mostly in the community and with community members after graduation such as disability studies programs.

Student suggestions of how to obtain research experience they felt they lacked to be a “Community Scholar” indicate that being exposed to the “Community Scholar” identity by itself might not be enough to entice students to seek out research training. Therefore one strategy in teaching about the “Community Scholar” identity could be to link the concept of “Community Scholar” to other similar concepts such as citizen science (Kullenberg and Kasperowski 2016b, Woolley et al. 2016), democratizing science (Bader 2014), DIY science (Nguyen 2016, Penders 2011), action research (Greenwood 2007, Radermacher et al. 2010), community science



(Wandersman 2003, Chinman et al. 2005), community researcher, and life-long learning (du Toit and Wilkinson 2011). Furthermore, it might be useful to provide community related examples of research projects for all these concepts that resonate with the students so they can see themselves performing as a community member after graduation.

Many of the above mentioned community based research discourses are thinking about conducting research without the involvement of academic institutions (Breen et al. 2015). As such, we posit that it is especially important for students to gain the research skills necessary so that they are able to conduct research in the community without the need to involve a researcher from an academic institution. This means that community researchers need to understand which studies require ethics certification and how to obtain the required certification to proceed and publish their findings. Indeed, education in community scholars would not only focus on teaching research methodology and methods but also teach administrative details to conducting research and to produce output in a way that it can make a difference in policies and in the goals of the community project.

Section 3: Utility of the “Community Scholar” identity for the community

Participants saw the “Community Scholar” identity as useful to the community organization suggesting that actions on the community and academic level by community members and academics might be warranted to expose the community to the “Community Scholar” identity and to train community members to become “Community Scholars”.

In our literature review no article was found that outlined how to teach community members the research skills necessary to go forward to conduct research without the involvement of academic researchers. If training community members was mentioned it was assumed that academics were still involved in the research project somehow. This suggests another possible focus for teaching by academic programs such as disability studies of which graduates work mostly in and with the community. There is no way that disability studies programs or, for that matter, disability studies scholars based in academia, can be involved in all the community projects that need to be generated to produce the evidence needed on, for example, the social situation of disabled people. If DIY (do it yourself) science (Nguyen 2016, Penders 2011) is discussed and “the building of a truly credible alternative to traditional institutional science” (Breen et al. 2015, p. 865) why not ‘DIY disability studies’ or ‘civic disability studies’? As such, we suggest exposing community members to the “Community Scholar” identity and training them as “Community Scholars” so they can generate evidence as community member with or without academic involvement could be a part of the mandate of disability studies programs.

The question is to what extent the idea of generating knowledge by “Community Scholars” will be accepted. Knowledge governance (Gerritsen et al. 2013) could be applied to DIY science, civic science, community labs and other endeavors that see the community member as the “Community Scholar”. Some describe community based participatory research (CBPR) as follows: “CBPR can reduce the tension between science and society by promoting genuine communication, by enabling scientists and administrators to listen and respond to the public, by



allowing communities to help shape the research agenda, and by increasing accountability of researchers and governments to the public” (Ali et al. 2008, p. 1281). However, CBPR does not reflect the full potential of the “Community Scholar” identity. Similarly, although the scholarship of engagement is described as “reciprocal practices of civic engagement into the production of knowledge” (Barker 2004, p. 124) and a “host of practices cutting across disciplinary boundaries and teaching, research, and outreach functions in which scholars communicate to and work both for and with communities” (Barker 2004, p. 124), it does not fulfill the full scope of the “Community Scholar” identity.

Public participation theory is described as “the process of involvement in public decision-making” (Pascu 2011, p. 16) whereby the public has meaningful participation that influences decisions (Arnstein 1969). Various ladders of participation exist (Radchuk et al. 2016). The question then arises what is the role of knowledge generation, of evidence generation, for these levels and who generates the evidence for the levels. The “Community Scholar” identity allows for a scenario that is in-sync with DIY science and “the building of a truly credible alternative to traditional institutional science” (Breen et al. 2015, p. 865), and ‘DIY disability studies’ or ‘civic disability studies’ whereby the knowledge production is also under the citizen control the highest level of participation achievable in the ladders of participation (Arnstein 1969, Radchuk et al. 2016).

It is discussed that one problem regarding the public participation of disabled people in policy and other discussion is that disabled people in many cases do not know enough to produce knowledge that can inform discussions (Wolbring and Diep 2016, Wolbring et al. 2013). This would mean that under the normative theory of expertise (Collins and Evans 2002) that disabled people could not contribute to certain ‘technical’ discussions. Although the theory that one can only take part if one contributes expertise is questioned by many within science and technology studies (Delgado et al. 2011), it suggests that people should be trained so that they have the expertise. As such, the “Community Scholar” identity may be a useful term to anchor the discussions around how to generate knowledge under what circumstances whether in conjunction with or without academic institutional involvement enriching in turn discussions around public participation.

Conclusion and Future direction

The aim of our study was to investigate the views of students of one *Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies* program on the concepts of “Community Scholar”. The three main findings of our study are that many participants see a utility of the “Community Scholar” identity for themselves (44.44%, Table 3) and the community (60.87%, Table 15). Exposure to the “Community Scholar” identity would have triggered participants to learn about how to do research (42.86%, Table 11) and 33.33% could see themselves as community scholars (question 20, Table 8). In both cases many had no opinion, which is not surprising given that most never heard of the concept of “Community Scholar” before the survey. Participants saw it of value to the



community if they themselves identified as community scholars and saw the “Community Scholar” identity as useful to the community organization.

Our findings indicate that it might be useful to focus on Community members as “Community Scholars” and to expose undergraduate students to the “Community Scholar” identity. Our findings suggest that a focus on training undergraduate students and community member to be “Community Scholars” might be warranted for disability studies and other programs whose undergraduates work mostly in and with the community after graduation. “The Community Scholar” identity might be a useful tool to broaden the academic and community based discussions around community based research in general, the role of students in the community after they graduate, the role of knowledge production by the community in moving up the rungs of the ladders of participation, and how to govern knowledge production.

Our study had the limitation that although our online delivered survey instrument allowed participants to comment, it did not allow us to ask participants to further expand or clarify for us what they have written. Furthermore, we only approached students from one academic program. Given the limitation of our study and the findings of the online survey and the literature review, various studies could be performed in the future.

Future direction

Given that our participants saw the “Community Scholar” identity to be useful for the community, it is important to investigate the views of community organizations on the utility of the “Community Scholar” identity and whether it reflects the views of the participants in our study.

Further research is warranted to explore the views of students from other degree programs where students seek community work after graduation such as social work, occupation therapy or community development on the utility of “Community Scholar” as an identity.

There is a need to investigate in greater detail the barriers that exist with being a “Community Scholar”. Certain barriers are discussed in the literature for conducting community research such as: lack of open access to academic and other needed literature and tools (Kullenberg and Kasperowski 2016a, Adishes and Whiting 2016), what counts as evidence (Christie 2006, Cowie and Khoo 2017, Ingold and Monaghan 2016, Mayan and Daum 2016), the need to provide training to community organizations and the need for external funding and lack of dedicated staff time to conduct or participate in research (Kwon et al. 2012). A recent thesis indicated many barriers for community members as knowledge producers (Diep 2017) however, more work is needed. Our literature review and our interview findings suggest that more research is warranted on who faces what kind of barriers to generate evidence, how to deal with barriers at the local level, and what the difference in barriers are between community research conducted with or without conjunction with academic institutions. It might be useful to expand our survey to include questions on the views of participants (students and community groups) on the barriers they see of being a “Community Scholar”.

Family support is seen as the third positive correlation identified by Armstrong et al. (2007) using the social-cognitive model of career choice, suggesting that it might be a useful research



project to ascertain how families engage with their family member who thinks about a) learning how to do research, and b) who wants to conduct research as part of their community employment.

Future research could be conducted using identity theory as a lens to investigate what weight participants would attribute to the identities of advocate, educator, scholar, and service provider. Given that responses in our survey suggest possible positive correlation between the scholar and advocacy identity it might be a useful research project to better understand how the “Community Scholar” identity may be linked to these other identities.

Finally, research is warranted to ascertain how programs whose undergraduates will work mostly in the community how best to train them to be “Community Scholars” and how programs that have a strong community connection can train community members to be “Community Scholars”.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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